

## Conversation with male, Connecticut (Transcription)

A 2)

The next excerpt is taken from original tape W 76.

Q: Where are the warehouses? The sheds I saw around here--where are the warehouses?

R: Well, there were local warehouses. As the business grew, local warehouses, they would build because they could get the local help here. The farmers who work in them. And then, East Hartford, and Hartford had what we call the big commercial warehouses.

Q: So that individuals didn't own them.

R: No, not, no. But outside here, we did. We had several that would pack probably, oh, probably two or three thousand cases of tobacco. And the big warehouse go way beyond that, of course.

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The smaller, well, like me, I wouldn't put up more than two hundred cases. They were located mainly in the heart--there was very little tobacco shipped-out unless it was in cases. We used to have them in Suffield in Massachusetts, and so forth around. But it was a locally processed, packed and sweated and processed. And then even we were given the iron band. There's one for you. The iron band means that when we shipped it

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any distance, the California, or to Germany, the boxes, the wooden boxes had to be the ends, each end wrapped with metal. And we call it the iron band.

Q: Giving it the iron band.

R: Yeah, that was the shipping. See, when I shipped, as I told you, to California, or out to Mr. Schoenfield, I had to band it. It wouldn't stand the transportation without, you know, the banging.

Q: Here's another word--I forget now where I picked-up this--this word, "sizing".

R: Well, the sizing is where you put the tobacco in lengths. Every two inches is called a size. And the broadleaf doesn't size as much, just a very little, but the Havana seed and shade is all sized.

Q: So you put according to the length.

R: Yes, yes. They have a table, a bench again. And as to how did we do for sorting, they'd go to the "pockets", as we called them. My God, there's another one. The pockets on the bench, there, see?

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Q: The pockets on the bench.

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R: And they take the leaf like this, and here you have these different lengths. an And you drop it in the one that fits. You draw it up, and so forth, and they call that "sizing".

Q: That's sizing.

R: Oh, yeah. And then they taken out, let's say 20, 22, 24 inch ...

Q: And you call those "pockets" on the bench. I think yesterday we used the word "bench" for stripping. Is the same bench used for sorting?

R: No, no it's all different ones.

Q: It's a different bench? In the warehouse?

R: Yeah.

Q: Are both of these in the warehouse?

R: No, the stripping bench is just merely a convenience so that it isn't so hard on your back. You don't have to bend over. A great many of the farmers just take it out of the pack and put the younger people, who are more limber. The older people go out front and take apart. There's a scanner up on top of a pile about this high. See, that would be about three feet. And they starts there, where they stand up here, and people just start to shake it. And you take them off and put them back over you. As it goes down you've got to go after it.

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Q: Oh yeah, as the pile goes down.

R: Yeah, and you have the table or the bench, a couple of saw horses with, we used to use a frame with burlap over it.

Q: That's the stripper's bench.

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R: Yeah. And take it and throw it on to there. And it's convenient there to handle. You wouldn't want to run a typewriter down on the floor.

Q: No.

R: It's the same thing. It's just convenience to get more (unintelligible) from you stripper.

Q: Now the sorting bench, is that in the warehouse?

R: Yes. That's in the warehouse.

Q: Is that the sizing?

R: Well, the sizing bench and the sorting bench are a little different. The pockets run the other way, but otherwise they're virtually the same.

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Q: Do they call it "bench" in both...

R: Yeah, "bench" in both places.

Q: Both places. Three times we've used "bench", then.

R: Yeah, yeah, that's right, yeah.

Q: All right, I just had to get that straight because I was confused.

R: All right, if we have time we could go over what was in the other sorting room. And (unintelligible). You can see them, the general, see what they are.

Q: Maybe we'll have time this afternoon.

R: The sizing boxes. You see, these, as we sort, the pockets run this way. And when they size, the pockets go this way. You take your tobacco, lay it up here. And you take a leaf and you drop it in either one of these pockets as you go. Now if you sizing, you put your back on this way, and this pocket's run out this way.

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Q: I see. Okay, I had another word here ...

R: Oh, I wish there so many of those words, and ...

Q: Now, the "dropper", does he actually do the planting? Like the setter?

R: Well, I was, yeah, dropper or setter, the same, his business is just the same. And his is the act that takes the plant from, what shall I say, bulk. It's not a package or anything. They have them in the boxes, and then they have them in their lap. And they take that from the bulk, and take each plant, root down, and he puts it down there. This is the act that sets the plant. But the ground, and the water, and everything else is prepared for him and his is the actual act of moving the plant from his lap to the ground where it'll grow.

Q: And he drops it down there, so that's why he's called

R: Well, I'm not merely, we call it dropping, but it's not really dropping. He has to, he really has to hold it from the lap well, bunch, or box, to the ground. And after he leaves it in the ground, it's set. He's, that's the actual, just the effect of setting the plant. And it wouldn't, the machine is nothing. You want to stop there a minute and I'll ...

PAUSE

Q: When you talked, you said .... What is it that you take off?

R: Oh, the budding comes first. Now as the plant grows, it will come up and starts to make a blossom. Now, it corresponds a great deal to a geranium blossom. Now, you must be familiar with geraniums. You know how that comes up and there's all those little leaves,

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packages there, ready to open out? Well, that's just what the tobacco plant does. It comes up to a head.

Q: It has a bud.

R: And when we take that out, which we do just a very tip of your fingers, take the bud out to stop it going to seed. Would posterity be the word there again? To go ahead to reproduce more, you know. We stopped that. To send it in to the leave, where we want it. After that comes up, we take that out. The stalk stiffens, and that keeps it from blowing over. We don't have to set it up if we get a wind or a rain. And then we top it down where we want it. And we break off ...

Q: How soon after is that?

R: Usually you bud, and a week, not over a week, you top it. After you bud it. Then you top it. In about a week. We roughly figure. And then it's three weeks from topping to cutting. Or harvesting.

Q: Okay, that's straightened me out on that. Now ...

R: Well, you get the idea? Of what I mean. Why we bud it first and then we top it.

Q: Oh yes. Unless you want the seeds, of course.

R: Yes, oh, well, the seed-growing, yes. Of course, now most farmers say six plants, ten, is a large amount, even the plantations don't save over twenty.

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Q: Really?

R: Oh yes. One or two plants, you know, will supply a countryside.

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Q: Now, I was going to ask you again about "dant". About the work dant.

R: Now, the word "damp" as we wanted for curing and taking-down, means heavy, humid, warm atmosphere.

Q: Makes the conditions.

R: Yeah. Yes. It needs enough to, a little like a fog. A fog damp. Isn't much good. But that's another coin. A word that we use for you, "fog damp".

Q: "Fog damp"?

R: "Fog damp". It isn't satisfactory in the storing of the bundles or in the warehouse. We generally have the condition in the warehouse. A fog damp is not good--too light, and it doesn't penetrate enough. We need in the damp a penetrating, heavily laden atmosphere, moisture, and warm. We need, as I said, it has to ... . We don't think tobacco damp at forty Very fast. It takes about sixty. Sixty degrees. If your atmosphere outside is sixty degrees. And of course that's another, we now use steam. Close the sheds when you do curing, and then turn steam, water in barrows in there, and spray it and artificially dampen it.



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Costs like blazes, but they do it. They have to. Yeah, yeah. In Pennsylvania, when you go down there, you'll get a different story. They have their sheds on brick and cellars, a basement. And they pass it down in there. And use a fire and steam, and keep the humidity where we do in warehousing. And then strip it. See? You have to handle it from the shed down in there, and then take it down, take it off the rack, and strip it. Take out the stalk. You're going to run into a different story down there!

Q: Yes, I will! Different story.

R: Yeah.

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Q: Now we were talking about, I think it was a harrow or something, and I couldn't understand the word on it. Was it "speck-tooth"?

R: A what?

Q: "Speck-tooth"? Or, it was on the tape yesterday. Speck-tooth. There was a ...

R: Let's see if I don't ...

Q: (unintelligible) harrow, or something.

R: Yeah, that's the "spike-tooth" harrow.

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Q: "Speck-tooth"?

R: "Spike"!

Q: "Spike"!

R: "Spike-toothed", yeah.

Q: s-p-i-k-e?

R: We call it "spike-toothed" or "smoothing" harrow.

O: "Spike toothed"

R: "Spike-tooth", I guess that's what you mean, because as I gave you the wheel harrow, the Meeker, the Acme, ...

Q: And the double?

R: The what?

Q: The double?

R: Oh, yes. The double-acting, yeah.

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Q: Double acting.

R: The flatter, the smoother.

Q: Okay, I didn't know how to spell the "spike-toothed". s-p-i-k-e, then.

R: Yeah.

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R: Then there was another word I took down in my notes. "Fitting", I think.

R: The what?

Q: "Fitting".

R: Oh yes, well ...

Q: What was that?

R: We call in the .... After we've plowed the ground, and harrowed it, put on our fertilizer soil, then before you start the setters, or the transplanters, we call it "fitting" the ground. That is, getting the fertilizer on, and breaking-up, it's cultivating --only not in rows--it's cultivating broadly. And that we call "fitting". We get the ground ready. It's all fitted-up. They say, "Well, tell the men." That's what comes out. You go out and fit-up the field.

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Well, he's supposed to know. (unintelligible) the wheel harrow, the Meeker harrow, the Acme harrow, the smoothing harrow, the Meeker harrow, whichever one according to atmospheric conditions as to the crust on the ground. Which one to use, you know, see. And that's where the straw boss or foreman comes in--that's his business, is to go out and fit-up the fields, you know. And, we have to fit it. We, you nearly always fit right ahead of the setter. Not over a day ahead of it.

Q: Oh. Uh-huh.

R: And always cultivate it up loose. Before you start transplanting.

END OF SIDE A